











# Father Damien

BY

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OXFORD

HOWARD WILFORD BELL

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Remember what a martyr said  
On the rude tablet overhead !  
' I was born sickly, poor and mean,  
A slave : no misery could screen  
The holders of the pearl of price  
From Cæsar's envy ; therefore twice  
I fought with beasts, three times I saw  
My children suffer by his law ;  
At last my own release was earned ;  
I was some time in being burned,  
But at the close a Hand came through  
The fire above my head, and drew  
My soul to Christ, whom now I see.  
Sergius, a brother, writes for me  
This testimony on the wall—  
For me, I have forgot it all'.

ROBERT BROWNING



*Sydney, February 25, 1890*



IR.—It may probably occur to you that we have met, and visited, and conversed; on my side, with interest. You may remember that you have done me several courtesies, for which I was prepared to be grateful. But there are duties which come before gratitude, and offences which justly divide friends, far more acquaintances. Your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage is a document which, in my sight, if you had filled me with bread when I was starving, if you had sat up to nurse my father when



he lay a-dying, would yet absolve me from the bonds of gratitude. You know enough, doubtless, of the process of canonization to be aware that, a hundred years after the death of Damien, there will appear a man charged with the painful office of the *devil's advocate*. After that noble brother of mine, and of all frail clay, shall have lain a century at rest, one shall accuse, one defend him. The circumstance is unusual that the devil's advocate should be a volunteer, should be a member of a sect immediately rival, and should make haste to take upon himself his ugly office ere the bones are cold ; unusual, and of a taste which I shall leave my readers free to qualify ; unusual, and to me inspiring. If I have at all learned the trade of using words to convey truth and to arouse emotion, you have at last furnished me with a subject. For it is in the interest of all mankind and the cause of public decency in every quarter of the world, not only that Damien should be righted, but that you and your letter should be displayed at

length, in their true colours, to the public eye.

To do this properly, I must begin by quoting you at large: I shall then proceed to criticize your utterance from several points of view, divine and human, in the course of which I shall attempt to draw again and with more specification the character of the dead saint whom it has pleased you to vilify: so much being done, I shall say farewell to you for ever.

*Honolulu, August 2, 1889*

REV. H. B. GAGE

Dear brother—In answer to your inquiries about Father Damien, I can only reply that we who knew the man are surprised at the extravagant newspaper laudations, as if he was a most saintly philanthropist. The simple truth is, he was a coarse, dirty man, headstrong and bigoted. He was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders; did not stay at the leper settlement (before he became one himself), but circulated freely over the whole island (less than half the

island is devoted to the lepers), and he came often to Honolulu. He had no hand in the reforms and improvements inaugurated, which were the work of our Board of Health, as occasion required and means were provided. He was not a pure man in his relations with women, and the leprosy of which he died should be attributed to his vices and carelessness. Others have done much for the lepers, our own ministers, the government physicians, and so forth, but never with the Catholic idea of meriting eternal life.

Yours, etc.,

C. M. HYDE <sup>1</sup>

To deal fitly with a letter so extraordinary, I must draw at the outset on my private knowledge of the signatory and his sect. It may offend others; scarcely you, who have been so busy to collect, so bold to publish, gossip on your rivals. And this is perhaps the moment

<sup>1</sup> From the *Sydney Presbyterian*, October 26, 1889.

when I may best explain to you the character of what you are to read: I conceive you as a man quite beyond and below the reticences of civility: with what measure you mete, with that shall it be measured you again; with you, at last, I rejoice to feel the button off the foil and to plunge home. And if in aught that I shall say I should offend others, your colleagues, whom I respect and remember with affection, I can but offer them my regret; I am not free, I am inspired by the consideration of interests far more large; and such pain as can be inflicted by anything from me must be indeed trifling when compared with the pain with which they read your letter. It is not the hangman, but the criminal, that brings dishonour on the house.

You belong, sir, to a sect—I believe my sect, and that in which my ancestors laboured—which has enjoyed, and partly failed to utilize, an exceptional advantage in the islands of Hawaii. The first missionaries came; they found the land already self-purged of its old and bloody

faith ; they were embraced, almost on their arrival, with enthusiasm ; what troubles they supported came far more from whites than from Hawaiians ; and to these last they stood (in a rough figure) in the shoes of God. This is not the place to enter into the degree or causes of their failure, such as it is. One element alone is pertinent, and must here be plainly dealt with. In the course of their evangelical calling, they—or too many of them—grew rich. It may be news to you that the houses of missionaries are a cause of mocking on the streets of Honolulu. It will at least be news to you, that when I returned your civil visit, the driver of my cab commented on the size, the taste, and the comfort of your home. It would have been news certainly to myself, had any one told me that afternoon that I should live to drag such matter into print. But you see, sir, how you degrade better men to your own level ; and it is needful that those who are to judge betwixt you and me, betwixt Damien and the devil's ad-

vocate, should understand your letter to have been penned in a house which could raise, and that very justly, the envy and the comments of the passers-by. I think (to employ a phrase of yours which I admire) it 'should be attributed' to you that you have never visited the scene of Damien's life and death. If you had, and had recalled it, and looked about your pleasant rooms, even your pen perhaps would have been stayed.

Your sect (and remember, as far as any sect avows me, it is mine) has not done ill in a worldly sense in the Hawaiian kingdom. When calamity befell their innocent parishioners, when leprosy descended and took root in the Eight Islands, a *quid pro quo* was to be looked for. To that prosperous mission, and to you, as one of its adornments, God had sent at last an opportunity. I know I am touching here upon a nerve acutely sensitive. I know that others of your colleagues look back on the inertia of your church, and the intrusive and decisive heroism of Damien, with something almost to be

called remorse. I am sure it is so with yourself; I am persuaded your letter was inspired by a certain envy, not essentially ignoble, and the one human trait to be espied in that performance. You were thinking of the lost chance, the past day; of that which should have been conceived and was not; of the service due and not rendered. *Time was*, said the voice in your ear, in your pleasant room, as you sat raging and writing; and if the words written were base beyond parallel, the rage, I am happy to repeat—it is the only compliment I shall pay you—the rage was almost virtuous. But, sir, when we have failed, and another has succeeded; when we have stood by, and another has stepped in; when we sit and grow bulky in our charming mansions, and a plain, uncouth peasant steps into the battle, under the eyes of God, and succours the afflicted, and consoles the dying, and is himself afflicted in his turn, and dies upon the field of honour—the battle cannot be retrieved as your unhappy irritation has suggested. It is a lost battle, and lost for

ever. One thing remained to you in your defeat—some rags of common honour; and these you have made haste to cast away.

Common honour; not the honour of having done anything right, but the honour of not having done aught conspicuously foul; the honour of the inert: that was what remained to you. We are not all expected to be Damiens; a man may conceive his duty more narrowly, he may love his comforts better; and none will cast a stone at him for that. But will a gentleman of your reverend profession allow me an example from the fields of gallantry? When two gentlemen compete for the favour of a lady, and the one succeeds and the other is rejected, and (as will sometimes happen) matter damaging to the successful rival's credit reaches the ear of the defeated, it is held by plain men of no pretensions that his mouth is, in the circumstance, almost necessarily closed. Your church and Damien's were in Hawaii upon a rivalry to do well: to help, to edify, to set divine examples.



You having (in one huge instance) failed, and Damien succeeded, I marvel it should not have occurred to you that you were doomed to silence; that when you had been outstripped in that high rivalry, and sat inglorious in the midst of your well-being, in your pleasant room—and Damien, crowned with glories and horrors, toiled and rotted in that pigstye of his under the cliffs of Kalawao—you, the elect who would not, were the last man on earth to collect and propagate gossip on the volunteer who would and did.

I think I see you—for I try to see you in the flesh as I write these sentences—I think I see you leap at the word pigstye, a hyperbolical expression at the best. ‘He had no hand in the reforms’, he was ‘a coarse, dirty man’; these were your own words; and you may think it possible that I am come to support you with fresh evidence. In a sense, it is even so. Damien has been too much depicted with a conventional halo and conventional features; so drawn by men who perhaps had not the eye to remark or the pen to

express the individual ; or who perhaps were only blinded and silenced by generous admiration, such as I partly envy for myself—such as you, if your soul were enlightened, would envy on your bended knees. It is the least defect of such a method of portraiture that it makes the path easy for the devil's advocate, and leaves for the misuse of the slanderer a considerable field of truth. For the truth that is suppressed by friends is the readiest weapon of the enemy. The world, in your despite, may perhaps owe you something, if your letter be the means of substituting once for all a credible likeness for a wax abstraction. For, if that world at all remember you, on the day when Damien of Molokai shall be named Saint, it will be in virtue of one work : your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage.

You may ask on what authority I speak. It was my inclement destiny to become acquainted, not with Damien, but with Dr Hyde. When I visited the lazaretto Damien was already in his

resting grave. But such information as I have, I gathered on the spot in conversation with those who knew him well and long: some indeed who revered his memory; but others who had sparred and wrangled with him, who beheld him with no halo, who perhaps regarded him with small respect, and through whose unprepared and scarcely partial communications the plain, human features of the man shone on me convincingly. These gave me what knowledge I possess; and I learnt it in that scene where it could be most completely and sensitively understood—Kalawao, which you have never visited, about which you have never so much as endeavoured to inform yourself: for, brief as your letter is, you have found the means to stumble into that confession. ‘*Less than one-half of the island*’, you say, ‘is devoted to the lepers’. Molokai—‘*Molokai ahina*’, the ‘grey’, lofty, and most desolate island—along all its northern side plunges a front of precipice into a sea of unusual profundity. This range of cliff is, from east to west, the

true end and frontier of the island. Only in one spot there projects into the ocean a certain triangular and rugged down, grassy, stony, windy, and rising in the midst into a hill with a dead crater: the whole bearing to the cliff that overhangs it somewhat the same relation as a bracket to a wall. With this hint you will now be able to pick out the leper station on a map; you will be able to judge how much of Molokai is thus cut off between the surf and precipice, whether less than a half, or less than a quarter, or a fifth, or a tenth—or say, a twentieth; and the next time you burst into print you will be in a position to share with us the issue of your calculations.

I imagine you to be one of those persons who talk with cheerfulness of that place which oxen and wainropes could not drag you to behold. You, who do not even know its situation on the map, probably denounce sensational descriptions, stretching your limbs the while in your pleasant parlour on Beretania street.

When I was pulled ashore there one early morning, there sat with me in the boat two sisters, bidding farewell (in humble imitation of Damien) to the lights and joys of human life. One of these wept silently ; I could not withhold myself from joining her. Had you been there, it is my belief that nature would have triumphed even in you ; and as the boat drew but a little nearer, and you beheld the stairs crowded with abominable deformations of our common manhood, and saw yourself landing in the midst of such a population as only now and then surrounds us in the horror of a nightmare — what a haggard eye you would have rolled over your reluctant shoulder towards the house on Beretania street ! Had you gone on ; had you found every fourth face a blot upon the landscape ; had you visited the hospital and seen the butt-ends of human beings lying there almost unrecognizable, but still breathing, still thinking, still remembering ; you would have understood that life in the lazaretto is an ordeal from which the

nerves of a man's spirit shrink, even as his eye quails under the brightness of the sun ; you would have felt it was (even to-day) a pitiful place to visit and a hell to dwell in. It is not the fear of possible infection. That seems a little thing when compared with the pain, the pity, and the disgust of the visitor's surroundings, and the atmosphere of affliction, disease, and physical disgrace in which he breathes. I do not think I am a man more than usually timid ; but I never recall the days and nights I spent upon that island promontory (eight days and seven nights) without heartfelt thankfulness that I am somewhere else. I find in my diary that I speak of my stay as a 'grinding experience' : I have once jotted in the margin, '*Harrowing* is the word' ; and when the *Mokolii* bore me at last towards the outer world, I kept repeating to myself, with a new conception of their pregnancy, those simple words of the song—

' 'Tis the most distressful country that ever yet  
was seen'.

And observe : that which I saw and suffered from was a settlement purged, bettered, beautified ; the new village built, the hospital and the Bishop-home excellently arranged ; the sisters, the doctor, and the missionaries, all indefatigable in their noble tasks. It was a different place when Damien came there, and made his great renunciation, and slept that first night under a tree amidst his rotting brethren : alone with pestilence ; and looking forward (with what courage, with what pitiful sinkings of dread, God only knows) to a lifetime of dressing sores and stumps.

You will say, perhaps, I am too sensitive, that sights as painful abound in cancer hospitals and are confronted daily by doctors and nurses. I have long learned to admire and envy the doctors and the nurses. But there is no cancer hospital so large and populous as Kala-wao and Kalaupapa ; and in such a matter every fresh case, like every inch of length in the pipe of an organ, deepens the note of the impression ; for what

daunts the onlooker is that monstrous sum of human suffering by which he stands surrounded. Lastly, no doctor or nurse is called upon to enter once for all the doors of that Gehenna; they do not say farewell, they need not abandon hope, on its sad threshold; they but go for a time to their high calling, and can look forward as they go to relief, to recreation, and to rest. But Damien shut to with his own hand the doors of his own sepulchre.

I shall now extract three passages from my diary at Kalawao.

*A* ' Damien is dead and already somewhat ungratefully remembered in the field of his labours and sufferings. " He was a good man, but very officious", says one. Another tells me he had fallen (as other priests so easily do) into something of the ways and habits of thought of a Kanaka; but he had the wit to recognize the fact, and the good sense to laugh at ' [over] ' it. A plain man it seems he was; I can not find he was a popular '.

*B* ' After Ragsdale's death ' [Ragsdale was a famous Luna, or overseer, of



the unruly settlement] 'there followed a brief term of office by Father Damien which served only to publish the weakness of that noble man. He was rough in his ways, and he had no control. Authority was relaxed: Damien's life was threatened, and he was soon eager to resign'.

C 'Of Damien I begin to have an idea. He seems to have been a man of the peasant class, certainly of the peasant type: shrewd, ignorant and bigoted, yet with an open mind, and capable of receiving and digesting a reproof if it were bluntly administered; superbly generous in the least thing as well as in the greatest, and as ready to give his last shirt (although not without human grumbling) as he had been to sacrifice his life; essentially indiscreet and officious, which made him a troublesome colleague; domineering in all his ways, which made him incurably unpopular with the Kanakas, but yet destitute of real authority, so that his boys laughed at him and he must carry out his wishes

by the means of bribes. He learned to have a mania for doctoring ; and set up the Kanakas against the remedies of his regular rivals : perhaps (if anything matter at all in the treatment of such a disease) the worst thing that he did, and certainly the easiest. The best and worst of the man appear very plainly in his dealings with Mr Chapman's money ; he had originally laid it out' [intended to lay it out] 'entirely for the benefit of Catholics, and even so not wisely ; but after a long, plain talk, he admitted his error fully and revised the list. The sad state of the boys' home is in part the result of his lack of control ; in part, of his own slovenly ways and false ideas of hygiene. Brother officials used to call it "Damien's Chinatown". "Well", they would say, "your Chinatown keeps growing". And he would laugh with perfect good-nature, and adhere to his errors with perfect obstinacy. So much I have gathered of truth about this plain, noble human brother and father of ours ; his imperfections are the traits of his face,

by which we know him for our fellow ; his martyrdom and his example nothing can lessen or annul ; and only a person here on the spot can properly appreciate their greatness'.

I have set down these private passages, as you perceive, without correction ; thanks to you, the public has them in their bluntness. They are almost a list of the man's faults, for it is rather these that I was seeking : with his virtues, with the heroic profile of his life, I and the world were already sufficiently acquainted. I was besides a little suspicious of Catholic testimony ; in no ill sense, but merely because Damien's admirers and disciples were the least likely to be critical. I know you will be more suspicious still ; and the facts set down above were one and all collected from the lips of Protestants who had opposed the father in his life. Yet I am strangely deceived, or they build up the image of a man, with all his weaknesses, essentially heroic, and alive with rugged honesty, generosity, and mirth.

Take it for what it is, rough private jottings of the worst sides of Damien's character, collected from the lips of those who had laboured with and (in your own phrase) 'knew the man'; though I question whether Damien would have said that he knew you. Take it, and observe with wonder how well you were served by your gossips, how ill by your intelligence and sympathy; in how many points of fact we are at one, and how widely our appreciations vary. There is something wrong here; either with you or me. It is possible, for instance, that you, who seem to have so many ears in Kalawao, had heard of the affair of Mr Chapman's money, and were singly struck by Damien's intended wrongdoing. I was struck with that also, and set it fairly down; but I was struck much more by the fact that he had the honesty of mind to be convinced. I may here tell you that it was a long business; that one of his colleagues sat with him late into the night, multiplying arguments and accusations; that the father listened as usual with

‘ perfect good-nature and perfect obstinacy ’ ; but at the last, when he was persuaded, ‘ Yes ’, said he, ‘ I am very much obliged to you ; you have done me a service ; it would have been a theft ’. There are many (not Catholics merely) who require their heroes and saints to be infallible ; to these the story will be painful ; not to the true lovers, patrons, and servants of mankind.

And I take it, this is a type of our division ; that you are one of those who have an eye for faults and failures ; that you take a pleasure to find and publish them ; and that, having found them, you make haste to forget the overveiling virtues and the real success which had alone introduced them to your knowledge. It is a dangerous frame of mind. That you may understand how dangerous, and into what a situation it has already brought you, we will (if you please) go hand-in-hand through the different phrases of your letter, and candidly examine each from the point of view of its truth, its appositeness, and its charity.

Damien was *coarse*.

It is very possible. You make us sorry for the lepers who had only a coarse old peasant for their friend and father. But you, who were so refined, why were you not there, to cheer them with the lights of culture? Or may I remind you that we have some reason to doubt if John, the Baptist were genteel; and in the case of Peter, on whose career you doubtless dwell approvingly in the pulpit, no doubt at all he was a 'coarse, headstrong' fisherman! Yet even in our Protestant Bibles Peter is called Saint.

Damien was *dirty*.

He was. Think of the poor lepers annoyed with this dirty comrade! But the clean Dr Hyde was at his food in a fine house.

Damien was *headstrong*.

I believe you are right again; and I thank God for his strong head and heart. \*

Damien was *bigoted*.

I am not fond of bigots myself, because they are not fond of me. But what is meant by bigotry, that we should regard it as a blemish in a priest? Damien believed his own religion with the simplicity of a peasant or a child ; as I would I could suppose that you do. For this, I wonder at him some way off ; and had that been his only character, should have avoided him in life. But the point of interest in Damien, which has caused him to be so much talked about and made him at last the subject of your pen and mine, was that, in him, his bigotry, his intense and narrow faith, wrought potently for good, and strengthened him to be one of the world's heroes and exemplars.

*Damien was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders.*

Is this a misreading? or do you really mean the words for blame? I have heard Christ, in the pulpits of our church, held up for imitation on the ground that

His sacrifice was voluntary. Does Dr Hyde think otherwise ?

*Damien did not stay at the settlement, etc.*

It is true he was allowed many indulgences. Am I to understand that you blame the father for profiting by these, or the officers for granting them ? In either case, it is a mighty Spartan standard to issue from the house on Beretania street ; and I am convinced you will find yourself with few supporters.

*Damien had no hand in the reforms, etc.*

I think even you will admit that I have already been frank in my description of the man I am defending ; but before I take you up upon this head, I will be franker still, and tell you that perhaps nowhere in the world can a man taste a more pleasurable sense of contrast than when he passes from Damien's 'China-town' at Kalawao to the beautiful Bishop-home at Kalaupapa. At this



point, in my desire to make all fair for you, I will break my rule and adduce Catholic testimony. Here is a passage from my diary about my visit to the Chinatown, from which you will see how it is (even now) regarded by its own officials : ‘ We went round all the dormitories, refectories, etc. : dark and dingy enough, with a superficial cleanliness, which he ’ [Mr Dutton, the lay brother] ‘ did not seek to defend. “ It is almost decent ”, said he ; “ the sisters will make that all right when we get them here.” ’ And yet I gathered it was already better since Damien was dead, and far better than when he was there alone and had his own (not always excellent) way. I have now come far enough to meet you on a common ground of fact ; and I tell you that, to a mind not prejudiced by jealousy, all the reforms of the lazaretto, and even those which he most vigorously opposed, are properly the work of Damien. They are the evidence of his success ; they are what his heroism provoked from the reluctant and the careless. Many

were before him in the field ; Mr Meyer, for instance, of whose faithful work we hear too little : there have been many since ; and some had more worldly wisdom, though none had more devotion, than our saint. Before his day, even you will confess, they had effected little. It was his part, by one striking act, of martyrdom, to direct all men's eyes on that distressful country. At a blow, and with the price of his life, he made the place illustrious and public. And that, if you will consider largely, was the one reform needful ; pregnant of all that should succeed. It brought money ; it brought (best individual addition of them all) the sisters ; it brought supervision, for public opinion and public interest landed with the man at Kalawao. If ever any man brought reforms, and died to bring them, it was he. There is not a clean cup or towel in the Bishop-home, but dirty Damien washed it.

*Damien was not a pure man in his relations with women, etc.*

How do you know that? Is this the nature of the conversation in that house on Beretania street which the cabman envied, driving past?—racy details of the misconduct of the poor peasant priest, toiling under the cliffs of Molokai?

Many have visited the station before me; they seem not to have heard the rumour. When I was there I heard many shocking tales, for my informants were men speaking with the plainness of the laity; and I heard plenty of complaints of Damien. Why was this never mentioned? and how came it to you in the retirement of your clerical parlour?

But I must not even seem to deceive you. This scandal, when I read it in your letter, was not new to me. I had heard it once before; and I must tell you how. There came to Samoa a man from Honolulu; he, in a public-house on the beach, volunteered the statement that Damien had ‘contracted the disease from having connection with the female lepers’; and I find a joy in telling you how the

report was welcomed in a public-house. A man sprang to his feet ; I am not at liberty to give his name, but from what I heard I doubt if you would care to have him to dinner in Beretania street. ‘ You miserable little —— ’ (here is a word I dare not print, it would so shock your ears). ‘ You miserable little —— ’, he cried, ‘ if the story were a thousand times true, can’t you see you are a million times a lower —— for daring to repeat it ’ ? I wish it could be told of you that when the report reached you in your house, perhaps after family worship, you had found in your soul enough holy anger to receive it with the same expressions : ay, even with that one which I dare not print ; it would not need to have been blotted away, like Uncle Toby’s oath, by the tears of the recording angel ; it would have been counted to you for your brightest righteousness. But you have deliberately chosen the part of the man from Honolulu, and you have played it with improvements of your own. The man from Honolulu—miserable, leering crea-

ture—communicated the tale to a rude knot of beach-combing drinkers in a public-house, where (I will so far agree with your temperance opinions) man is not always at his noblest; and the man from Honolulu had himself been drinking—drinking, we may charitably fancy, to excess. It was to your ‘Dear brother, the Reverend H. B. Gage’, that you chose to communicate the sickening story; and the blue ribbon which adorns your portly bosom forbids me to allow you the extenuating plea that you were drunk when it was done. Your ‘dear brother’—a brother indeed—made haste to deliver up your letter (as a means of grace, perhaps) to the religious papers; where, after many months, I found and read and wondered at it; and whence I have now reproduced it for the wonder of others. And you and your dear brother have, by this cycle of operations, built up a contrast very edifying to examine in detail. The man whom you would not care to have to dinner, on the one side; on the other, the Reverend Dr Hyde and the

Reverend H. B. Gage : the Apia bar-room, the Honolulu manse.

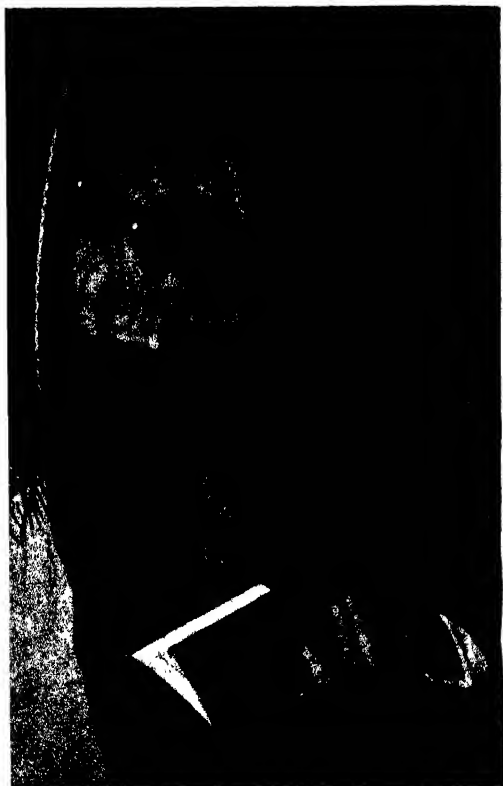
But I fear you scarce appreciate how you appear to your fellow-men ; and to bring it home to you, I will suppose your story to be true. I will suppose—and God forgive me for supposing it—that Damien faltered and stumbled in his narrow path of duty ; I will suppose that, in the horror of his isolation, perhaps in the fever of incipient disease, he, who was doing so much more than he had sworn, failed in the letter of his priestly oath—he, who was so much a better man than either you or me, who did what we have never dreamed of daring—he too tasted of our common frailty. ‘O, Iago, the pity of it!’ The least tender should be moved to tears ; the most incredulous to prayer. And all that you could do was to pen your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage !

Is it growing at all clear to you what a picture you have drawn of your own heart ? I will try yet once again to make it clearer. You had a father : suppose

this tale were about him, and some informant brought it to you, proof in hand : I am not making too high an estimate of your emotional nature when I suppose you would regret the circumstance ? that you would feel the tale of frailty the more keenly since it shamed the author of your days ? and that the last thing you would do would be to publish it in the religious press ? Well, the man who tried to do what Damien did, is my father, and the father of the man in the Apia bar, and the father of all who love goodness ; and he was your father too, if God had given you grace to see it.









*Text of letter on preceding page*

‘MY DEAR EDWARD CLIFFORD  
—Your sympathising letter of 24 gives me some relief in my rather distressed condition. I try my best to carry without much complaining and in a practical way, for my poor soul’s sanctification, the long foreseen miseries of this disease, which, after all, is a providential agent to detach the heart from all earthly affection, and prompts much the desire of a Christian soul to be united—the sooner the better—with Him Who is her only life.

‘During your long traveling road homewards please do not forget that narrow road—we both have to walk carefully, so as to meet together at the home of our common and eternal Father. My kind regards and prayers and good wishes for all sympathising friends.

‘*Bon voyage, mon cher ami, et au revoir au ciel.*

‘*Votus tuus,*

‘J. DAMIEN’



## ADDENDA



CONTINENTAL critic, with a proneness to comparison-drawing, has declared that the genius of the English language is such that it does not lend itself competently to the expression of noble passions, that righteous indignation fails to find words and phrases of adequate warmth and intensity. As if to refute this charge of insufficiency came a slender pamphlet from the South seas, charged with the zeal of an inspired advocate. The immediate object and

circumstance of this address are of trivial consequence ; it is in its broader meaning and application that it becomes a document of great moment in the propaganda of the humanitarians.

*With Mr R. L. Stevenson's compliments.* FATHER DAMIEN. *An open letter to the Reverend Dr Hyde of Honolulu from Robert Louis Stevenson.* Sydney. 1890. Such was the superscription of this letter in defence of a humble benefactor of men. The thirty-two page pamphlet was privately printed for presentation only, March 27, 1890. The sensitive disinterestedness of the author was further shown by his refusal to accept payment for his *Apologia*. He wrote the publisher : 'The letter to Dr Hyde is yours, or any man's I will never touch a penny of remuneration. I do not stick at murder ; I draw the line at cannibalism. I could not eat a penny roll that piece of bludgeoning had gained for me'.

From Stevenson's letters are drawn these exacter details of his impressions of Molokai.

‘ The day was on the peep out of a low morning bank, and we were wallowing along under stupendous cliffs. As the lights brightened, we could see certain abutments and buttresses on their front where wood clustered and grass grew brightly. But the whole brow seemed quite impassable, and my heart sank at the sight. Two thousand feet of rock making 19° (the Captain guesses) seemed quite beyond my powers. However, I had come so far ; and, to tell you the truth, I was so cowed with fear and disgust that I dared not go back on the adventure in the interests of my own self-respect.

‘ Presently we came up with the leper promontory : lowland, quite bare and bleak and harsh, a little town of wooden houses, two churches, a landing-stair, all unsightly, sour, northerly, lying athwart the sunrise, with the great wall of the pali cutting the world out on the south. Our lepers were sent on the first boat, about a dozen, one poor child very horrid, one white man, leaving a large grown

family behind him in Honolulu, and then into the second stepped the sisters and myself.

‘I do not know how it would have been with me had the sisters not been there. My horror of the horrible is about my weakest point ; but the moral loveliness at my elbow blotted all else out ; and when I found that one of them was crying, poor soul, quietly under her veil, I cried a little myself ; then I felt as right as a trivet, only a little crushed to be there so uselessly.

‘I thought it was a sin and a shame she should feel unhappy ; I turned round to her, and said something like this : “Ladies, God Himself is here to give you welcome. I’m sure it is good for me to be beside you ; I hope it will be blessed to me ; I thank you for myself and the good you do me”. It seemed to cheer her up ; but indeed I had scarce said it when we were at the landing-stairs, and there was a great crowd, hundreds of (God save us !) pantomime masks in poor human flesh, wait-

ing to receive the sisters and the new patients.

‘Every hand was offered : I had gloves, but I had made up my mind on the boat’s voyage *not* to give my hand ; that seemed less offensive than the gloves. So the sisters and I went up among that crew, and presently I got aside (for I felt I had no business there) and set off on foot across the promontory, carrying my wrap and the camera. All horror was quite gone from me : to see these dread creatures smile and look happy was beautiful.

‘On my way through Kalaupapa I was exchanging cheerful *alohas* with the patients coming galloping over on their horses ; I was stopping to gossip at house-doors ; I was happy, only ashamed of myself that I was here for no good. One woman was pretty, and spoke good English, and was infinitely engaging and (in the old phrase) *towardly* ; she thought I was the new white patient ; and when she found I was only a visitor, a curious change came in her face and voice—the



only sad thing, morally sad, I mean—that I met that morning. But for all that, they tell me none want to leave.

‘Beyond Kalaupapa the houses become rare; dry stone dykes, grassy, stony land, one sick pandanus; a dreary country; from overhead in the little clinging wood shogs of the pali chirruping of birds fell; the low sun was right in my face; the trade blew pure and cool and delicious; I felt as right as ninepence, and stopped and chatted with the patients whom I still met on their horses, with not the least disgust. About halfway over, I met the superintendent (a leper) with a horse for me, and O, wasn’t I glad!’

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‘I am just home after twelve days journey to Molokai, seven of them at the leper settlement, where I can only say that the sight of so much courage, cheerfulness, and devotion strong me too high to mind the infinite pity and horror of the sights. I used to ride over from Kalawao to Kalaupapa (about three miles across the promontory, the cliff-wall

ivied with forest and yet inaccessible from steepness, on my left), go to the sisters' home, which is a miracle of neatness, play a game of croquet with seven leper girls (90° in the shade), get a little old-maid meal served me by the sisters, and ride home again, tired enough, but not too tired.

• The girls have all dolls, and love dressing them. You who know so many ladies delicately clad, and they who know so many dressmakers, please make it known it would be an acceptable gift to send scraps for doll dressmaking to the Reverend Sister Maryanne, Bishop-home, Kalaupapa, Molokai, Hawaiian islands.

• I have seen sights that can not be told, and heard stories that can not be repeated: yet I never admired my poor race so much, nor (strange as it may seem) loved life more than in the settlement. A horror of moral beauty broods over the place: that's like bad Victor Hugo, but it is the only way I can express the sense that lived with me all these days. And this even though it

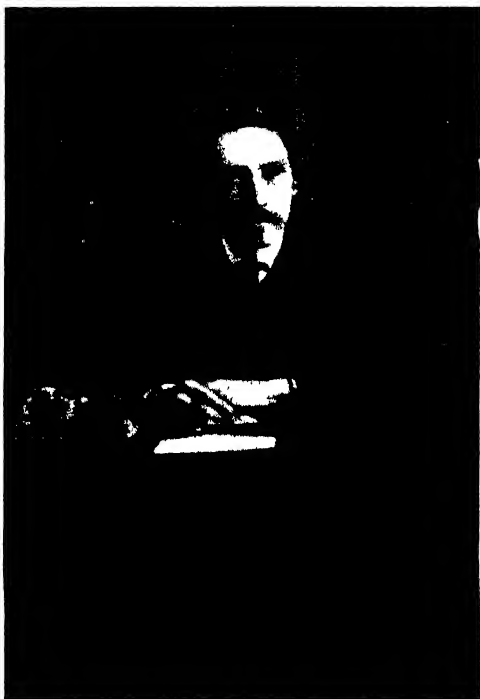
was in great part Catholic, and my sympathies flew never with so much difficulty as towards Catholic virtues.

‘The pass-book kept with heaven stirs me to anger and laughter. One of the sisters calls the place “the ticket office to heaven”. Well, what is the odds? They do their darg and do it with kindness and efficiency incredible; and we must take folk’s virtues as we find them, and love the better part.

‘Of old Damien, whose weaknesses and worse perhaps I heard fully, I think only the more. It was a European peasant: dirty, bigoted, untruthful, unwise, tricky, but superb with generosity, residual candour and fundamental good-humour: convince him he had done wrong (it might take hours of insult) and he would undo what he had done and like his corrector better. A man,

with all the grime and pal-  
triness of mankind, but  
a saint and hero  
all the more  
for that’.





‘There are not too many heroisms in the world ; the earth, as Carlyle said, will not become too God-like. Obscure bigots who are never tired of proclaiming that they are Christians will take very good care of that. But to ignorant intolerance, which presumes to revile such a life as Damien’s because he is not this and he is not that, may be very decisively applied the crushing rebuke which the brother of the dead Ophelia addressed to the “churlish priest” in *Hamlet*.’

ARCHIBALD BALLANTYNE.

‘ I tell thee, churlish priest,  
A ministering angel shall my sister be,  
When thou liest howling’.

*Hamlet*, v. 1.



## R. L. STEVENSON'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE



THE title of this paper may not seem a particularly hopeful one. Stevenson the storyteller we all know; his name stands for the very spirit of romance. Stevenson the philosopher does not sound promising. Surely there was never less in any writer of the abstraction of philosophy. Least of all do we expect moralizing philosophy. So little is there of ethics, there may seem to be scarcely morals. His best characters have few enough of the copy-book virtues; his worst are as bad as they are made; yet we

find something admirable in them all. And Stevenson seems to intend that we should. What an admirable character is Alan Breck! yet to the eye of cauld morality what is he but a brand plucked from the burning?—well described by Mr Raleigh as insolent, revengeful, implacable, a condoner of murder, a cattle-lifter, a confirmed gambler, and internally as vain as a peacock. As for John Silver, we all know him for the arch-scoundrel that he is. Yet for once at least Silver speaks the words of truth and soberness when, in the fable called *The persons of the tale*, he steps out of the book for half an hour to enjoy a pipe and a chat with the virtuous Smollett between the chapters. ‘What I know is this: if there is sich a thing as a Author, I’m his favourite chara’ter. He does me fathoms better ’n he does you—fathoms, he does. And he likes doing me. He keeps me on deck mostly all the time, crutch and all; and he leaves you measling in the hold, where nobody can’t see you nor wants to, and you may lay to that! If



there is a Author, by thunder, but he 's on my side, and you may lay to it.' It is in vain that Smollett protests that the author is on the side of good, and that Silver has to mind his eye because he is not through the story yet. Silver is right. The author's imagination, and with it the reader's (if not his heart as well), is engaged to Silver, and there 's an end to it.

This being so, it might seem as though a critic had little to do who goes in search of moral teaching in these bright books— hunting for the owl of philosophy among the sea-gulls and birds of paradise that circle and float through their pages.

But we all know there is another side to Stevenson's work. He would have been no true Scotsman had he not been something of a moralist and theologian as well as writer of romance. 'You can keep no man long', he writes in his essay on Burns, 'nor Scotchman at all, off moral or theological discussion'. Besides

the Stevenson of *Treasure island*, *Kidnapped*, and *The master of Ballantrae*, accordingly we have the Stevenson of *Virginibus puerisque*, of *Men and books*, of *Memories and portraits*, of the *Fables* and of *Lay morals*. Some critics indeed seem to deplore this side of his literary work, which seems to rank him with Montaigne and Pepys rather than with Scott, Victor Hugo, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, his proper kindred, and would fain represent it as secondary and subordinate to his true character as irresponsible poet and romancer.

This appears to me not only to ignore a whole side of the man, but to be a preliminary to misunderstanding the whole scope and purport of his creative work. In what follows I propose to suggest that these essays are not a regrettable incident in the life of a poet and romancer (as some would have us believe), nor again (as others) that they represent the surplus energy of a versatile writer; but that they reflect a more or less coherent philosophy of life, apart from which it

is impossible either to understand the man or properly to appreciate the aim he sets before himself in the practice of his art.

If we were to try to indicate in a word the central feature that distinguishes the poetry and fiction of our own time from that of the earlier part of the century just past, we should find it probably in a certain note of sadness—we might almost say disillusionment—that marks our own age. It is not only that we live in a period of religious unsettlement, the old order changing, yielding place to new; but the social changes that inspired Burns and Shelley, and even stirred the colder blood of Wordsworth with hopes of a new heaven and a new earth, have ended far otherwise than they dreamed—settling upon us what, in the opinion of those who ought to know, is one of the prosiest and most disheartening forms of civilization that the world has ever seen. The sphinx-like question whether life is worth living, and if so what makes it,

has been put, and the value to our generation of the works of poets and artists is more and more coming to be measured by the answer to it that they have to give—the force and energy with which they can inspire or re-inspire our wills, the courage with which they themselves can keep on the ‘sunny side of doubt’ and hearten others to walk there along with them.

。 To judge from one side of Stevenson’s work we could hardly guess that there was any such question as this for him; and so acute a critic as Mr William Archer was so far deceived by it as to publish in the year 1885 a review of his style and thought, in which he attacked him as a fairweather prophet. But we now know how far this was from the truth, and in the light of his work as a whole, taken along with his recently published *Letters to his family and friends*, wonder how the mistake could ever have been made. We now know how deeply he had drunk of the spirit of his time, how heavily its problem weighed upon

him, and, in general at least, with what centralizing ideas he sought to lighten it.

The question was not to him (it is not, I suppose, to anyone) whether life in itself as a merely vegetable process is worth carrying on. The answer to this (if it is ever seriously put) is that none of us really proposes to give it up. We all intend to live as long as we can, or at least as long as is decent. Stevenson certainly in this respect was no pessimist, but held that ordinary life taken by itself had a balance of happiness, or at least of pleasure. 'I should bear false witness', he writes after six months of almost total physical collapse, 'if I did not declare life happy'. And five years later, when he had left this country for good and was running a race against death in the South sea island he had chosen for his home (and, as it turned out, his grave), after telling a friend that he had not known *happiness* for many a year, he goes on: 'But I know *pleasure* still, and,

take my life all through, look at it fore and back, and upside down—though I would fain change myself—I would not change my circumstances'. The question is not whether it is worth while living, but whether it is worth while trying to live strenuously and truly, and if so, why? To this it is usual to answer yes, and to assign as reason that in the long run it pays—philosophers merely differing from common people in making the run somewhat longer. This was not an answer that was likely to commend itself to Stevenson. 'Happiness and goodness', he exclaims, 'according to canting moralists, stand in the relation of effect and cause. There never was anything less proved or less probable: our happiness is never in our own hands. . . . Virtue will not help us, and it is not meant to help us. It is not even its *own* reward, except for the self-centred, and—I had almost said—the unamiable'.

And in another passage, addressing a young man who had written for advice on the choice of the artist's profession.

he uses words which, although in their immediate context referring to the life of art, are yet equally applicable to the art of life : ' In the wages of the *life*, not in the wages of the *trade*, lies your reward ; the work is here the wages '. ' Men ', he says again, ' do not want, and I do not think they would accept, happiness '—what they live for is something quite different. ' Gordon was happy at Khartoum in his worst hours of danger and fatigue, Aurelius was happy in the detested camp, Pepys was pretty happy, and I am pretty happy on the whole '.

If not happiness, what then is it that inspires men in living ? Stevenson answers (and this is the central point of all his teaching) that it is a vision of something they hardly acknowledge to themselves—an ideal of a life behind and beyond their conscious impulses, something now hidden by insistent passions, now flashing out clear and strong like a revolving light at sea—in one man radiant and far-reaching, in another struggling through a sorely bemisted or distorted medium.

Many passages could be quoted in which he states his belief in this universal instinct towards some decency of life with which happiness in any of the commonly recognised forms has little or nothing to do : this, perhaps, the most convincing :

‘ Ah ! if I could show you this ! if I could show you these men and women, all the world over, in every stage of history, under every abuse of error, under every circumstance of failure, without hope, without help, without thanks, still obscurely fighting the lost fight of virtue, still clinging to some rag of honour, the poor jewel of their souls ! . . . Of all earth’s meteors here is the most strange and consoling : that this ennobled lemur, this hair-crowned bubble of the dust, this inheritor of a few years and sorrows, should yet deny himself his rare delights, and add to his frequent pains, and live for an ideal, however misconceived. Nor can we stop with man. . . . The browsers, the biters, the barkers, the hairy coats of field and forest, the squirrel in the oak, the thousand-footed creeper in the



dust, as they share with us the gift of life, share with us the love of an ideal: strive like us—like us are tempted to grow weary of the struggle—to do well; like us receive at times unmerited refreshment, visitings of support, returns of courage, and are condemned like us to be crucified between that double law of the members and the will’.

It may be said that this loyalty to an ideal itself witnesses to a faith—the faith, at least that it is possible in some degree to realize it because it is in some way of the nature of things. Stevenson admits it. It is the express moral of the fable, *Something in it*. It is expressed more vigorously still in a letter to Mr Sidney Colvin: ‘I believe in the ultimate decency of things, ay, if I woke in hell, should still believe it’. Not, it will be admitted, a lengthy creed. Short as it is, Stevenson lays little stress on it. Most men, he held, live without ever formulating it to themselves, and when they come to die it is not required of them. ‘Here lies one who meant well, tried a little, failed

much', is his own suggestion for an epitaph. The important thing is not what we consciously believe, nor even what we do, but what we mean and how we mean it. Perhaps, after all, the manliest life is that which can do without even this poor rag of a confession.

Such at least seems the burden of another of the fables, *Faith, half faith, and no faith at all*, where his ideal of a man is neither the priest with his proofs of the existence of God in the works of nature, nor the virtuous person who dispenses with any such, relying on the witness of his soul and of the soul of Odin, that 'great is the right, and shall prevail', but the old rover, who has no visible faith at all but hies cheerily along without one. By their fruits you know them. The news comes that the great God is besieged in heaven, and like enough to perish out of it. While priest and virtuous person hasten to make their peace with the devil, the old rover only swings his axe the more bravely and sheers off 'to die with Odin'.

From this central notion that what is good in life and what each in his heart of hearts desires is not any wages of life, but courageous utterance of himself in the ways appointed to him, follow other notions in Stevenson's mind as to the cardinal virtues required of a man.

We have got out of the way of speaking of our virtues. Perhaps because we are not conspicuous for any that are worth speaking of. Perhaps because we have so many that it would be invidious to make distinctions. All the same, such as we have are the underlying props of all the best things about us. Wherever we dig we come upon them, as on some of our high-roads you come, when you dig a foot or two, on the great flags that the Romans laid for them. And when we have a chance of hearing something about them from a man who had them of the right sort himself and knows what they are, it is worth while stopping to listen. Some of them are called cardinal because everything hinges on them, and they

may be taken to represent the whole catalogue.

One of these is temperance. The word with us does not hit off the meaning. We think of total abstiners or of short commons of 'cakes and ale'. That was not the old idea of it. The Greeks, for instance (who knew a thing or two that we, to our loss, have forgotten), thought not of total abstention in connection with temperance, but of total enjoyment. They called it 'whole-mindedness', and they meant the power, not of starving an innocent taste or desire, but of giving all healthy instincts their place in a full and harmonious life. It suggested to them not asceticism but enjoyment—the enjoyment of ourselves as complete human beings. The middle ages brought a different idea. It came to be thought that there was a special merit in asceticism for its own sake, as though pain and self-denial were something good in themselves, and we only required to be miserable enough here to have a long banker's account in heaven. All healthy

modern teaching is a protest against this idea. And Stevenson's is here the healthiest. It is true that there are some whose circumstances are peculiar, or who have a double dose of original sin in some direction. These, Stevenson held, may be called on for heroic sacrifices: 'Pascal laid aside mathematics; Origen doctored his body with a knife. Every day some one is thus mortifying his dearest interests and desires, and entering maim into the kingdom of heaven'. But this is not an ideal state of things. Our idea of heaven is not of an asylum for the lame, the halt and the blind—a kind of glorified hospital for incurables. 'To conclude ascetically', says Stevenson, 'is to give up and not to solve the problem. The ascetic and the creeping hog, although they are at different poles, have equally failed in life. The one has sacrificed his crew; and the other brings back his seamen in a cock-boat and has lost the ship. I believe there are not many sea-captains who would plume themselves on either result as a success'. It is, of course, a terrible

mistake to let the soul drive before every gust of passion, but it is no less a mistake merely to lay to with sheets drawn into the wind and catching none of it. The true way of salvation is to set forward, and that as early as may be, on some respectable enterprise, the pursuit of knowledge or skill, success or power if you like, in soldiering, doctoring, teaching, trading, art, politics, or law—something that, because it needs all our powers, forces us to husband our resources and turn our back on everything that dissipates them. This, at any rate, is Stevenson's teaching. The demand of the soul, he sums up, is 'that we shall not pursue broken ends, but great and comprehensive purposes in which soul and body may unite like notes in a harmonious chord. The soul demands unity of purpose, not the dismemberment of man; it seeks to roll up all his strength and sweetness, all his passion and wisdom into one, and make him a perfect man, exulting in perfection'.

But temperance is at best only a negative virtue—a husbanding of our

forces. Its positive counterpart, the virtue we require for the effective use of them is the second of the cardinal virtues—the one the Greeks and Romans called courage or manliness—the virtue or excellence which sets us to do and keeps us doing the positive work of the world.

The great thing Stevenson held was to get people under way. Even good people want the necessary courage for the work required of them. They are so afraid of doing wrong that they are apt to do nothing at all. They are so good in general that they are apt to be good for nothing in particular. Stevenson has no patience with this kind of goodness, and does not mince matters. 'We are not damned', he tells us, 'for doing wrong, but for not doing right'. 'Acts may be forgiven, but not even God can forgive the hanger back'. 'Choose the best if you can, or choose the worst, that which hangs in the wind dangles from a gibbet'.

In the same key he protests in *Our Lady of the Snows* against the monastic

idea of courage, as he elsewhere protests against the monastic idea of temperance :

‘O to be up and doing, O  
Unfearing and unshamed to go  
In all the uproar and the press  
About my human business !  
My undissuaded heart I hear  
Whisper courage in my ear.  
With voiceless calls, the ancient earth  
Summons me to a daily birth.  
Thou, O my love, ye, O my friends —  
The gist of life, the end of ends —  
To laugh, to love, to live, to die,  
Do call me by the ear and eye !’

Addressing the monks on the mountains :

‘But ye ?—O ye who linger still  
Here in your fortress on the hill,  
With placid face, with tranquil breath,  
The unsought volunteers of death,  
Our cheerful General on high  
With careless looks may pass you by’.

One of the conditions of this active, forward-looking virtue is to forget the things that are behind, the faults and failures of the past. ‘It is certain’, he says, ‘that we all think too much of sin’—a whole-



some heresy which he illustrated in one of the shortest of the fables :

A man met a lad weeping. 'What do you weep for?' he asked. 'I am weeping for my sins', said the lad. 'You must have little to do', said the man. The next day they met again. Once more the lad was weeping. 'Why do you weep now?' asked the man. 'I am weeping because I have nothing to eat', said the lad. 'I thought it would come to that', said the man.

If he has little sympathy with the good people who hang fire because they have gone wrong in the past, or because they are afraid of going wrong in the future, he has still less to say to the people who are deterred from brave undertakings by the fear of what may happen to themselves. He is always ready with a gibe for this kind of mistaken prudence—for the man who with his own purse or his own wretched skin in his eye never gets further in a moral enterprise than a half-penny postcard, or a walk with an umbrella, an innocent piece of furniture

which he insisted on taking as the symbol of this kind of self-created impediment to swift, effective action. ‘“ I have not forgotten my umbrella ”, said the careful man. But the lightning struck him’—the shortest fable I suppose in the language.

Another enemy to the proper sort of courage is the weight with which habit and convention press on us—the paralyzing power that the past exercises over the present, what others are doing over what it is right for us to do. ‘ Although built of nerves ’, Stevenson writes, ‘ and set adrift in a stimulating world, men develop a tendency to go bodily asleep, and to become engrossed among the reflex and mechanical parts of life, till they lose both the will and the power to look higher considerations in the face. ‘ This is ruin, this is the last failure in life, this is temporal dampation, damnation on the spot, and without the form of judgment ’. It is in this connection that we must take the ceaseless war he waged both in theory and in his own practice against

the merely customary and conventional, and the contempt he always has ready for the class of people who take it as their guide, the 'damp ginger-bread puppets' who get no satisfaction out of life themselves, and give none to anyone else.

No action (according to this reading) is truly good or manly that does not embody some individual thought or express some individual feeling, that does not bear (in a word) the image and superscription of the man himself. 'To do anything', says Stevenson, 'because others do it, and not because the thing is good or kind or honest in its own right, is to resign all moral control and all captaincy upon yourself, and go post-haste to the devil with the greatest number'. If it seemed to any reader that in his eagerness to set people a-going upon action he went near denying any radical distinction between good and evil, you have only to hear him in the present connection. What he here requires is that people should rouse themselves to a sense of the *significance of conduct*, the eternal distinction there is in

the nature of things between that which is rightly and that which is wrongly done. The fatal defect (he holds) of current standards is not that they are too stringent about right and wrong, but that they tend to confound all moral distinctions in a universal drab of social conformity. 'The truth is', he writes, 'by the scope of our present teaching nothing is thought very wrong, and nothing very right, except a few actions which have the disadvantage of being disrespectful—when found out; the more serious part of men inclining to think all things rather wrong, the more jovial to suppose them right enough for practical purposes'. What is most wanted in these days—the one thing needful every day—is that we bring the same energy and intelligence that we apply to our businesses and professions to that most difficult of all businesses—the business of living—and take some individual responsibility to have it managed on the best known plan. What makes life seem stale and unprofitable to so many and

renders it possible to ask that stupidest of questions—whether it is worth living at all—is that they have never taken any trouble to discover what it can be at its best, or to think of it as having any possibilities at all beyond the dull round within which custom and fashion have bound it. To rouse men from the sullen stupor in which most of them live, to awaken them to the things of the soul (which, when rightly looked at, are only the common things of the world about us seen in the fresh light of feeling and imagination), is the greatest work to which preacher or poet can be called. If there be any who are beyond such human help, for them nothing remains but some sharp visitation of God—none being too sharp, so as it effect the cure and give them back to themselves.

‘ If I have faltered more or less  
In my great task of happiness;  
If I have moved among my race  
And shown no glorious morning face;  
It beams from happy human eyes  
Have moved me not; if morning skies,

Books and my food, and summer rain  
Knocked on my sullen heart in vain:  
Lord, Thy most pointed pleasure take  
And stab my spirit broad awake ;  
Or, Lord, if too obdurate I,  
Choose Thou, before that spirit die,  
A piercing pain, a killing sin,  
And to my dead heart run them in'!

The rest of Stevenson's philosophy of life may be summed up in the two great virtues of honesty and kindness. These seem simple enough, and to require little thought to understand their scope. But that is just where we commonly go wrong. We interpret them either far too narrowly or far too widely to be of any real value as finger-posts in the way of life. Thus, to hear some people talk of honesty, you would suppose that the chief end of man was to avoid being hanged. If they keep their hands out of their neighbours' pockets, if they pay the wages of the market in solid coin of the realm, if they spend the time that is paid for at the desk, behind the counter, or in the class-room—they have fulfilled all the law and the prophets. This was

not Stevenson's view. Honesty he held to be something much more wide-reaching. What it was in detail I do not propose here to ask. But if you wish to know what interpretation one who was himself the honestest of workers put upon this uncommonest of the virtues, I would refer you to the passage in *Lay morais* beginning with the sentence— itself one that Edmund Burke might have written: 'You can make no one understand that his bargain is anything more than a bargain, whereas in point of fact it is *a link in the policy of mankind*, and either a good or an evil to the world'.

While his aim is here to extend the scope of what is meant by honesty in what he says of kindness, he seems at times to go in the opposite direction, and to be seeking to narrow it down to its simplest and most commonplace manifestations

'There is an idea abroad among moral people', he writes, 'that they should make their neighbours good. One person

I have to make good—myself'. 'As for doing good—that is one of the professions that are full'. In other passages he seems to go even further, and to drive this individualistic morality to the verge of paradox. 'A. has as good a right to go to the devil as we to go to glory, and neither knows what he does.' Phrases like these seem out of touch with the enlargement which we rightly seek in these days to give to the ancient virtue of charity when we insist that mere kindness is not enough, but that for the redress of the 'world-pain' we require a sterner virtue, bearing a closer resemblance to justice than to charity. Stevenson, we know, ardently sympathised with this extension of the scope of human kindness. His fear was, lest in the process of extension it might lose something of the sweetness and graciousness, the readiness to consider circumstances and to make allowance, to suffer long and yet be kind—all, in fact, that the Greeks understood by the 'equity' which is the highest form of justice. For the rest, he held that when



the question lies between the near and the distant, the duty to *kin* and the duty to *kind*, the knowledge and the talents of the vast majority of us fit us better for the former than for the latter. From this point of view who could desire a better summary of the whole duty of man than the following?—

‘To be honest, to be kind—to earn a little and to spend a little less ; to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce when that shall be necessary and not be embittered, to keep a few friends but these without capitulation—above all, on the same grim condition to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy’.

For these scraps of a moral philosophy I have gone to the essays and poems, and to the *Lay morals*, which aimed at making them something more. It remains to ask whether they throw any new light on his stories of adventure,

and on the use he made of his supreme gift as writer of romance—not at first sight, as we have seen, a promising task. True, some of the shorter stories are conscious illustrations of moral ideas. The reader will think in this connection of the best known of them, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. But there are others in which the union of the romantic and the ethical is far more perfect, and which stand on the highest level of romantic literature just on this account. *Markheim* is one, and *Will o' the mill* another. Nevertheless they are only a fragment, and with *Dr Jekyll* thrown in could be put together in a couple of hundred pages. What are we to say of the rest of them, with their swearing, fighting, plundering, buccaneering crew, and the whole round of breathless adventure, dear to heart of man and boy alike, for no other reason than that it seems all to be told for its own sake and for nothing else whatever? Of this and all other genuine romance two things remain to be said. Stevenson himself has said them, or at least one of them.

First, morality is not the pinchbeck affair its advocates would sometimes have us believe. You cannot get it all into a copy-book, nor into a book at all, any more than you can get all of the sunshine into a picture or the whole music of the spheres into a sonata. At the best the writer who tries will fail. At the worst, if he is true to life and to himself, he cannot help getting some in. Now these stories and the characters that are the soul of them have a bit—and, if Stevenson's ideas about it are true, a good solid bit—of their own. The first duty in Stevenson's philosophy of life is to be alive, and alive his villains certainly are. They 'play the merry game of warre', against all social and moral conventions, with such zest, such lightheartedness that the most puritanic reader is bound to share in their enormities. They devote themselves to crime with a cheerful strenuousness, a whole-mindedness, a richness of ingenuity, and a singleness of purpose that leave nothing to be desired. There is no hanging in the wind

here—nothing to suggest a doubt or call a halt, nothing to suggest repentance or disillusionment. They keep it up to the last. ‘Even the lower and lesser villainy of Israel Hands’, to quote Mr Raleigh again, ‘breathes out its soul in a creed’. ‘For thirty years I’ve sailed the seas and seen good and bad, better and worse, provisions running out, knives going and what not. Well now, I tell you I never seen good come of goodness yet. Him as strikes first is my fancy; dead men don’t bite; them’s my views. Amen, so be it’. This is doubtless what Mr J. M. Barrie meant when he found in these romances the incarnate spirit of boyhood tugging at the skirts of this old world of ours, and compelling it to come back and play.

But this is not all; there is something more. The boy is there, but the poet and artist is there too, with his precious gift of which we stand so much in need. The note of warning struck in the more serious writings against the deadening power of custom and familiarity changes

in the romances to a bold appeal to the imagination as the revealer and vivifier of our world. Stevenson tells us of the ways and works of simple men—their sailings, their fightings, their treasure-seeking, their love and hatred: the tales appeal to elemental instincts, and remind us, that the world is eternally young, perennially marvellous. Round familiar things—a seaport tavern, a highland cave, a mountain pass, a lighthouse on the cliff, an island in the offing—he weaves that great web of romance, which binds together the world of nature and of man's spirit: man and his environment grow one. His choice of words alone illustrates this wizard's power. To some this seems too manifestly careful and deliberate—the thing too obviously done. But surely no care is too great which has the effect of striking fire at once from the thing and from the word that describes it. And this is what Stevenson's words, not once or twice, but constantly and habitually do. Such phrases taken at random as the 'wallowing stonelighters'

towed out to the rocks of Dhyne-Heartache, the cathedral 'flanching' down to the plain, the dawn of 'essential daylight clean and colourless', the 'crouching juniper', the 'crystal quiet', 'tumultuary silences', the 'crashing run of the sea upon the shore', seem at once to give life to the things they describe and to leap into life themselves. This is a great gift. 'Men', said Heraclitus, 'are estranged from the word that is most familiar to them; what they daily meet is a stranger to them'. To give them back the words and things, that have thus grown old and dull with the usage of the world, with the dew of the morning upon them is surely the maker's service.

But the artist is sometimes conscious of his own mission. Stevenson is sometimes accused of being too self-conscious. We can excuse the self-consciousness that enables him to tell us, as he has done in his own inimitable way, of what a story-teller can do for his fellow-men. The fable of *The touchstone* comes last, perhaps as his *Apologia*.

Two king's sons rode out to find the trial stone of truth. The younger found a fragment of a mirror and was well content with that, for it reflected things as they really are. 'There is no truth but plain truth', said he, 'and this reflects what I can see'. The elder son sought on, for he said: 'Surely in the trial stone of truth there should be more than seeming'. Many folks owned touchstones and willingly gave them to him until his wallet was full. At length a poor and speechless man, who lived on the cliff by the sea, gave him a clear pebble without beauty and without colour, so that the elder son at first looked upon it scornfully. But at the end of the day he got down from his horse and emptied forth his wallet by the roadside. Now in the light of each other all the touchstones lost their hue and fire and withered like stars at morning, but in the light of the pebble their beauty remained, only the pebble was the most bright. And the elder son smote upon his brow. 'How if this be the truth', he cried, 'that all

are a little true?' And he took the pebble and turned its light upon the heavens, and they deepened about him like the pit ; and he turned it on the hills, and the hills were cold and rugged, but life ran in their sides so that his own life bounded ; and he turned it on the dust, and he beheld the dust with joy and terror ; and he turned it on himself and kneeled down and prayed.

J. H. MUIRHEAD

*University of Birmingham,*  
*1 June 1901.*

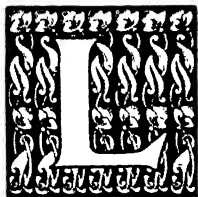




## R. L. S.—SOME EDINBURGH NOTES

' Give me again all that was there,  
Give me the sun that shone !  
Give me the eyes, give me the soul,  
Give me the lad that 's gone !'

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



LOUIS STEVENSON was born in 8 Howard place, then an outlying suburban street between Edinburgh and the sea ; and the substantial but unpretending house with its small plot of garden in front will doubtless be visited with interest in future by those

who like to look on the birthplaces of famous men.

17 Heriot row, on one of Edinburgh's level terraces between the steep hills, 'from which you see a perspective of a mile or so of falling street', became his home before he was out of velvet tunics and socks, but as his mother was delicate, they lived when the weather was genial 'in the green lap of the Rutland hills', at Swanston, a few miles from Edinburgh. He, however, spent his winters at Heriot row, when he grew into an Academy boy, though not a specially brilliant scholar. His doubtful health would often stand as an excuse, when the rain splattered on the panes, or the square gardens opposite were hid in a scowling 'haur', for the small Louis to remain and 'Child play' beside his pretty mother. No doubt, too, the truant spirit was strong within him when he trotted down hill to school, 'rasping his clachan' on the area railings' as he made an

<sup>1</sup> A clachan is a wooden racket Edinburgh academy boys play ball with.

Edinburgh hero of his do. We first knew Louis Stevenson when his school days and teens were past, and he was facing what he called 'the equinoctial gales of youth', and beginning to put his self-taught art of writing into print. He had great railings against his native town in these days, which were somewhere in the heart of the seventies. 'The 'meteorological purgatory' of its climate embittered him, as his frail frame suffered, sorely from the bleak blasts. He vowed his fellow-townsmen had a list to one side by reason of having to struggle against the east wind. He gave his spleen vent in *Picturesque notes of Edinburgh*, yet by way of apology he says, 'the place establishes an interest in people's hearts; go where they will, they find no city of the same distinction, go where they will, they take a pride in their old home'. No one could clothe the historical tales of Edinburgh in more graphic words than this slim son of hers. Often he would talk thereon, and he speaks of his joy, as a lad, in finding 'a

nugget of cottages at Broughton ' ; and any bit of old village embedded in the modern town, he espied and rejoiced over. He would frequently drop in to dinner with us, and of an evening he had the run of our smoking-room. After 10 p.m., when a stern old servant went to bed, the ' open sesame ' to our door was a rattle on the letter-box. He liked this admittance by secret sign, and we liked to hear his special rat-a-tat, for we knew we would then enjoy an hour or two of talk which, he said, ' is the harmonious speech of two or more, and is by far the most accessible of pleasures '. He always adhered to the same dress for all entertainments, a shabby, short, velveteen jacket, a loose, Byronic, collared shirt (for a brief space he adopted black flannel ones), and meagre, shabby-looking trousers. His straight hair he wore long, and he looked like an unsuccessful artist, or a poorly-clad but eager student. He was then fragile in figure and, to use a Scottish expression, *shilpit*-looking. There is no English equivalent for *shilpit*, being

lean, starveling, ill-thriven, in one. His dark, bright eyes were his most noticeable and attractive feature ; wide apart, almost Japanese in their shape, and above them a fine brow.

He was pale and sallow, and there was a foreign, almost gipsy look about him, despite his long-headed Scotch ancestry. In the *Inland voyage*, he complains, he 'never succeeded in persuading a single official abroad of his nationality'. I do not wonder he was suspected of being a spy with false passports, for he had a very un-British smack about him ; but, slim and pinched-looking though he was, he still commanded notice by his unique appearance and his vivacity of expression. His manners, too, had a foreign air with waving gestures, elaborate bows, and a graceful nimbleness of action.

By our library fire, on the winter evenings, he planned the canoe trip with my brother, and told us in the following season how the record of this *Inland voyage* progressed. He was also laying future plans for a further trip, as he said,

smiling with fun, with another donkey, —this time to the Cevennes. After the *Inland voyage*, Louis was full of a project to buy a barge and saunter through the canals of Europe, Venice being the far-off terminus. A few select shareholders in this scheme were chosen, mostly artists, for the barge plan was projected in the mellow autumnal days at Fontainebleau forest, where artists abounded. Robert A. Stevenson, Louis's cousin, then a wielder of the brush, was to be of the company. He, too, though he came of the shrewd Scottish civil engineer stock, had, like his kinsman, a foreign look and a strong touch of Bohemianism in him. He, also, with these alien looks, had his cousin's attractive power of speech and fertile imagination. The barge company were then all in the hey-day of their youth. They were to paint fame-enduring pictures, as they leisurely sailed through life and Europe, and when bowed, grey-bearded, bald-headed men, they were to cease their journeyings at Venice. There, before St Mark's, a crowd of clamor-

ously eager picture dealers and lovers of art were to be waiting to purchase the wonderful work of the wanderers. The scene in the piazza of St Mark's on the barge's arrival, and the excited throng of anxious buyers, the hoary-headed artists, tottering under the weight of canvases, was pictured in glowing colours by their author, when the forest was smelling of the 'ripe breath of autumn'. The barge was purchased, but bankruptcy presently stared its shareholders in the face. The picture dealers of that day were not thirsting to buy shareholders' pictures. The man of the pen had only ventured on an *Inland voyage*, and as yet no golden harvest for his work lined the pockets of his velvetten coat. The barge was arrested and, with it, the canoes which have earned an everlasting fame through the 'Arctusa's' pen. They were rescued, the barge sold and the company wound up.

We saw most of Louis Stevenson in winter, when studies and rough weather held him in Edinburgh. In summer he

was off to the country, abroad, or yachting on the west coast, for in his posthumous song he truly says :

‘ Merry of soul he sailed on a day  
Over the sea to Skye . . . ’

As a talker by the winter’s fireside in these unknown-to-fame days, we give him the crown for being the king of speakers. His reading, his thoughts thereon, his plans, he described with a graphic and nimble tongue, accompanied by the queer flourishing gesticulations and the ‘ speaking gestures ’ of his thin, sensitive hands. We teased him unmercifully for his peculiarities in dress and manner. It did not become a youth of his years, we held, to effect a bizarre style, and he held he lived in a free country, and could exercise his own taste at will. Nothing annoyed him more than to affirm his shabby clothes, his long cloak, which he wore instead of an orthodox great coat, were eccentricities of genius. He certainly liked to be noticed, for he was full of the self-absorbed conceit of youth. If he



was not the central figure, he took what we called Stevensonian ways of attracting notice to himself. He would spring up full of a novel notion he had to expound (and his brain teemed with them), or he vowed he could not speak trammelled by a coat, and asked leave to talk in his shirt sleeves. For all these mannerisms he had to stand a good deal of chaff, which he never resented, though he vehemently defended himself or fell squashed for a brief space in a limp mass into a veritable back seat.

Looking back through the mellowing vista of years these little eccentric whims were all very harmless and guileless, and I own we were hard on the susceptible lad, but, as we told him, it was for his good, and if he had been like ourselves, with a band of brothers, egotisms would have been stamped out in the nursery. He would, after a severe shower of chaff, put out his cigarette, wind himself in his cloak and silently, with an elaborate bow, go off; but to his credit be it said, he bore no ill will. His very sensitiveness

was to his tormentors conceit. He wrote of himself later that he was 'a very humble-minded youth, though it was a virtue he never had much credit for'. He is credited now with it, for as the then 'unchartered desert of the future' lies mapped out, we see that his fantastic ways were not affectations, but second nature, to which the life he chose in the subtle south was an appropriate setting. We never, though we gibed him sorely, found fault with his enthusiasm; it was so infectious and refreshing. He was always brimful of new ideas, new ventures, full of sweeping changes, a rabid radical, a religious doubter; though with him, as with many others, there was more 'belief in honest doubt than half their creeds'. He had an almost child-like fund of insatiable curiosity. He thirsted to know how it would feel to be in other people's shoes, from those of a king to a beggar, and he smoked on the hearthrug an endless succession of cigarettes and put his imaginations thereof into words.

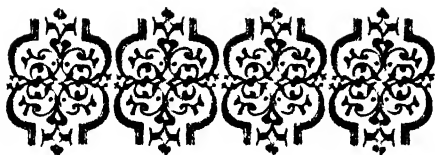
He was very sore and somewhat rebellious over writing not being considered a profession, and having to bend to his good father in so far as to join the Scottish bar. For long 'R. L. Stevenson, Advocate', was on the door-plate of 17 heriot row. The Parliament house saw him seldom, never therein to practise his bewigged profession. We frightened him much by avowing that a clerk was hunting for him, and even the rich library below the trampling advocate's feet could not wile him into the old hall for some time after that false scare. He also heard he had been dubbed 'That gifted boy and the new Chatterton' by an idle legal wit. That name more nearly persuaded him to have his hair shorn to an orthodox length than any other entreaty. Like all people with character, he had animosities, but he was very just and tolerant in belabouring an adversary with his tongue, which, considering he was in the full bloom of the critical self-satisfiedness of youth, showed a just mind and kindness of heart. Some people, whose

stupid dullness he had fallen foul of and had hurled some sarcasms at, he next, in his queer inquisitive way, fell to wondering what it would be like to be inside their torpid minds and view things from their dead level. He was fond of travel, of boating, of walking tours, but he was no sportsman, and not even a lover of the gentle art. Though his friends were all golfers (and golf then was mostly confined to Scotland), I do not think he ever took a club in hand. His eyes, when outside, were wholly occupied enjoying his surroundings and painting them in words. 'Even in the thickest of our streets', he noted, 'the country hill tops find out a young man's eyes and set his heart beating for travel and pure air'. He loved to wander round his native city. Duddingstone was one favourite haunt, Queensferry was another, and the Hawes inn there, now grown into a villa-fied hotel, with the hawthorn hedges still in its garden, had attractions for him. From it Davie Balfour was 'kidnapped', and rest-and-be-thankful on Corstorphine

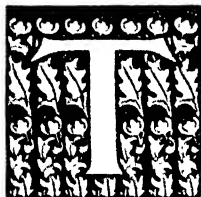
hill, where Allan and Davie part after their adventures, we often walked to on Sundays, and all the while he was busy talking and full of plans and projects. The Jekyll and Hyde plot he had in his brain, and told us of in those days. Burke and Hare had a fascination for him. A novel called the *Great north road* was another plot in his mind. His *Virginibus puerisque* is dedicated to W. E. Henley, of whom I heard Stevenson speak when he had first discovered him an invalid in the Edinburgh infirmary. He came in glowing with delight at the genius he had found and began ransacking our shelves for books for him. A few days later he was bristling with indignation because some people who visited the sick objected to the advanced and foreign literary food Stevenson had fed his new acquaintance on, and left a new supply of tract literature in their stead. In the preface of *Virginibus puerisque*, which is dedicated to Mr Henley, Stevenson says: 'These papers are like milestones on the wayside of my life'.

To those who knew him in these past days, to re-read these papers seem to travel the same road again in the same good company. They recall the slight, boyish-looking youth they knew, and to those who live under the stars which Stevenson thought shone so bright—the Edinburgh street lamps—he was not so much the famous author, but the sympathetic comrade, the unique, ideal talker we welcomed of yore. As he truly said, ‘The powers and the ground of friendship are a mystery, but looking back I can discern in part we loved the thing he was, for some shadow of what he was to be’.

EVE BLANTYRE SIMPSON



## STEVENSON'S LITERARY APPRENTICESHIP



HE rank of Stevenson as a 'master of word-craft' is indisputably high; shortly before his death an English critic wrote: 'Of living authors, none perhaps bewitches the reader more than Mr Stevenson, who plays upon words as if they were a musical instrument'; and in a recent number of *The Cosmopolitan* Mr Zangwill says that Tennyson himself 'was not Stevenson's superior in exquisite expression, and all

the young men who really cared for letters, as distinct from the journeymen novelists and the hack dramatists, turned to him as to a high priest of prose, and a pious conservator of the austere sanctities of literature'. His ideal of prose style is thus succinctly stated in the essay 'On style in literature' that he contributed to the April, 1885, number of *The Contemporary review* :

'We have, peculiar to the prose writer, the task of keeping his phrases large, rhythmical and pleasing to the ear, without ever allowing them to fall into the strictly metrical: peculiar to the versifier, the task of combining and contrasting his double, treble, and quadruple pattern, feet and groups, logic and metre—harmonious in diversity: common to both, the task of artfully combining the prime elements of language into phrases that shall be musical in the mouth; the task of weaving their argument into a texture of committed phrases and of rounded periods—but this particularly binding in the case of prose; and again common to



both, the task of choosing apt, explicit, and communicative words'.

By what literary apprenticeship he himself attained a style that was the admiration of his readers and the envy and despair of his critics, I hope to make clear by piecing together extracts from his essays, from letters, and from newspaper interviews.

Stevenson was not bred to the profession of letters; he came from a race of engineers and was himself intended by his father for that profession. His grandfather, Robert Stevenson, was one of the most eminent engineers that Scotland has produced, and won great fame by building the Bell rock and Skerryvore light-houses. Of the former achievement he published an account that has been called 'a masterpiece of its kind', 'the romance of lime and mortar'. His son Thomas succeeded him as consulting engineer to the board of Northern lights and was the sixth of the family to hold that position. Naturally he desired to be succeeded by his son Robert Louis Balfour, and so, after his

academy days were over sent him to the University of Edinburgh.

But though he speaks highly of engineering as a profession — mainly because so large a portion of the engineer's time is spent in the open air—Louis's heart was not in his work. Mr. Barrie's statement that 'now and again he looked in at his classes when he happened to be that way' is of course a bit of humorous exaggeration. Stevenson himself says 'I have attended many lectures in my time. I still remember that the spinning of a top is a case of kinetic stability. I still remember that emphyseus is not a disease, nor stillicide a crime'; but he significantly adds 'But though I would not willingly part with such scraps of science, I do not set the same store by them as by certain other odds and ends that I came by in the open street while I was playing truant'.

As a matter of fact Stevenson could almost have addressed his *alma mater* in De Quincey's words to Oxford: 'Ancient mother, I owe thee nothing'. His one

college distinction was a certificate of excellence in mathematics. In the paper that he contributed to 'The New Amphion', the book published by the students of the Edinburgh union at the time of their fancy fair, he speaks in the kindest terms of Professor Tait, the professor of physics, and Professor Kelland, the professor of mathematics ('No man's education is complete or truly liberal who knew not Kelland'); but has but little to say of the professors of literature and the humanities. Though no less a man than John Stuart Blackie was professor of Greek, he was not in his classes above a dozen times; and more than once when signing his certificate of attendance the professor told him that he did not know his face.

To tell the truth, he 'cut' on principle, and writes 'no one ever played the truant with more deliberate care, and none ever had more certificates for less education. . . . I denied myself many opportunities; acting upon an extensive and highly rational system of truancy, which cost

me a great deal of trouble to put in exercise—perhaps as much as would have taught me Greek—and sent me forth into the world and the profession of letters with the merest shadow of an education’.

• But his truancy was truancy with a purpose, and notwithstanding his delightful ‘Apology for idlers’, he was no idler. He had decided for himself that ‘books are good enough in their own way, but they are a mighty bloodless substitute for life’; and in the streets and lanes of Auld Reekie, by the burns, and on the braes, he was ‘practically demonstrating the great Theorem of the Livableness of Life’, and gathering materials for the romances that were even then teeming in his brain.

For he had already determined that he would become a writer, and earnestly and faithfully did he work at his self-imposed tasks. Though he rebelled against studies in which he had no interest and against the monotony and confinement of college life, he did not shrink from exercises more severe than any that his professors set

him. In all his rambles he was provided with two books, one from which to read, one in which to write descriptions of what he saw. His solitary walks were accompanied by dramatic dialogues, in which he played many parts. Even his summers in the lighthouse tender among the northern islands and his practical engineering work on the breakwater at Anstruther but added to his literary aspirations and contributed to his equipment as a writer.

‘ I loved the art of words and the appearances of life ’, he writes, ‘ and *travelers*, and *headers*, and *rubble*, and *polished ashlar*, and *pierres perdues*, and even the thrilling question of the *string-course* interested me only (if they interested me at all) as properties for some possible romance or as words to add to my vocabulary ’.

After his hard day’s work was over he sat late into the night writing, writing, writing ; ‘ toiling (as I thought) under the very dart of death, toiling to leave a memory behind me ’.

The most efficient part of his training, however, he considered not the attempts at original writing, which were for the most part produced for practice only with no ulterior purpose, but the conscious imitation of the work of the masters. A long quotation will make this clearer than a paraphrase :

‘ Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it ; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful ; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann. I remember one of these monkey tricks, which

was called *The vanity of morals*; it was to have had a second part, *The vanity of knowledge*; and as I had neither morality nor scholarship, the names were apt; but the second part was never attempted, and the first part was written (which is my reason for recalling it, ghost-like, from its ashes) no less than three times—first, in the manner of Hazlitt; second, in the manner of Ruskin, who had cast on me a passing spell; and third, in a laborious *pasticcio* of Sir Thomas Browne. So with my other works: *Cain*, an epic, was (save the mark!) an imitation of *Sordello*: *Robin Hood*, a tale in verse, took an eclectic middle course among the fields of Keats, Chaucer, and Morris; in *Monmouth*, a tragedy, I reclined on the bosom of Mr Swinburne; in my innumerable gouty-footed lyrics, I followed many masters; in the first draft of *The king's pardon*, a tragedy, I was on the trail of no less a man than John Webster; in the second draft of the same piece, with staggering versatility, I had shifted my allegiance to Congreve, and of course

conceived my fable in a less serious vein ; for it was not Congreve's verse, it was his exquisite prose, that I admired and sought to copy. Even at the age of thirteen I had tried to do justice to the inhabitants of the famous city of Pebbles in the style of the *Book of snobs*. So I might go on for ever, through all my abortive novels, and down to my later plays. . . .

- 'That, like it or not, is the way to learn to write ; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. . . . Before he can tell what cadences he truly prefers, the student should have tried all that are possible ; before he can choose and preserve a fitting key of words, he should long have practised the literary scales ; and it is only after years of such gymnastic that he can sit down at last, legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice, and he himself knowing what he wants to do and (within the narrow limit of a man's ability) able to do it.



‘ And it is the great point of these imitations that there still shines beyond the student’s reach his inimitable model. Let him try as he please, he is still sure of failure ; and it is a very old and a very true saying that failure is the only high-road to success’.

In a very interesting letter that he contributed to *The British weekly*, he names the books that most strongly influenced him. He had ‘ the gift of reading ’, an open, receptive mind that led him to strive to understand and sympathize with his author, however new, false, or dangerous his statements might at first sight appear ; and he names a curious, heterogeneous lot of books as those that contributed to the development of his character. The New Testament and Herbert Spencer, Shakspeare and Martial, Thoreau and Marcus Aurelius, Wordsworth and Dumas, Penn’s ‘ Maxims ’, and Lewes’ ‘ Life of Goethe ’ stand together in the list. Montaigne’s ‘ Essays ’, ‘ that temperate and genial picture of life ’, was one of his earliest books ;

Meredith's 'Egoist' seemed 'an unmanly but very serviceable exposure of himself'; Mitford's 'Tales of old Japan' first taught him 'the proper attitude of any rational man to his country's laws'; Whitman's 'Leaves of grass' 'tumbled the whole world upside down for him'; and Hazlitt's essay 'On the spirit of obligations' 'was a turning point in his life'. Of Scott he makes no mention in the letter, but elsewhere he acknowledges his obligation to his master in the art of story-telling.

To his fellow-students in the university his literary ambitions could not remain unknown, and when three of the most distinguished members of the Speculative society determined to found a magazine to print their own lucubrations, they called to their aid 'a certain lean, ugly, idle, unpopular student', and Robert Louis Stevenson was made co-editor and a sharer in the risk. In this college magazine, which 'ran four months in undisturbed obscurity and died without a gasp', Stevenson had the proud satisfac-

tion of first seeing his productions clothed with the dignity of printer's ink. He cherished no illusions as to the fate of the venture ; in the bottom of his heart he knew from the first 'that the magazine would be a grim fiasco ; that it would not be worth reading ; and that, even if it were, nobody would read it' ; and he writes *apropos* of the expense, 'It was a comfortable thought to me that I had a father'.

Possibly the failure of this enterprise may have had something to do with Mr Stevenson's opposition to his son's desire to take up literature as a profession, and to insist that, the idea of engineering having been given up, he qualify himself for the bar. Somewhat rebelliously Louis consented, and it is recorded that for some time 'R. L. Stevenson, Advocate', could be read on a door-plate in Edinburgh. But it is nowhere recorded that he *practised* his profession, and the false report that a clerk was looking for him to engage him in a case is said to have so frightened him that for some time he

avoided the Parliament house, notwithstanding the attraction of its library. As he expected the failure of the magazine, it was no disappointment, and he continued turning his experience into copy and occasionally succeeded in getting an article printed and paid for. An account of a canoe trip with a friend on the waterways of Belgium and northern France seemed to him important enough for independent publication, and as he succeeded in finding a publisher willing to give the twenty pounds that he asked for the manuscript, 'An inland voyage', his first book, appeared. The favourable reviews made it evident that he had made no mistake as to his vocation; and, though nearly ten years elapsed ere he could make a living by his pen, from that time he considered himself a writer by profession.

Fragile though his bodily frame may have been, the spirit that it clothed was indomitable. Though he early knew that he 'was not born for age', he did not weakly succumb to disease; but acted on his own advice, 'if the doctor

does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be accomplished in a week'. Years ago he was considered a dying man, yet he worked on with such undaunted energy and unflagging industry, that when 'God's pale Prætorian' suddenly threw him into the great waters, he had completed upwards of twenty-five volumes. And what forceful, virile volumes they are! When too ill to rise from his bed, he propped his tablet against his knees and wrote page after page of exquisite beauty, full of the joy of life, the surge of the sea, the fragrance of the Highland heather; and in the magic alembic of his brain distilled the experiences of a valetudinarian in search of health into stirring stories of daring adventure. And in these waning days of the decadent movement, when so much undoubted literary ability is prostituted to the service of the morbid, the sickly sentimental, and the unclean, it is still true that of the most exquisite master of style of the time it can be written :

‘ He held his pen in trust  
To art, not serving shame or lust ’.

No other writer of our time has come as near as Stevenson to the conquest of a perfect English style. He is the one who stands first with the true lovers of the art of words. To quote from himself he is the one who is most unceasingly inspired by ‘an unextinguishable zest in technical successes’ and has also most constantly remembered that ‘the end of all art is to please’.

No golden dome shines over Damien's sleep :  
A leper's grave upon a leprous strand,  
Where hope is dead, and hand must shrink from  
    hand,  
Where cataracts wail toward a moaning deep,  
And frowning purple cliffs in mercy keep  
All wholesome life at distance, hath God planned  
For him who led the saint's heroic band,  
And died a shepherd of Christ's exiled sheep.  
O'er Damien's dust the broad skies bend for  
    dome,  
Stars burn for golden letters, and the sea  
Shall roll perpetual anthem round his rest :  
For Damien made the charnel-house life's  
    home,  
Matched love with death ; and Damien's name  
    shall be  
A glorious benediction, world-possess.

H. D. RAWNSLEY



The bibliographical history of the *Open letter* has a certain interest. The several editions may be thus enumerated :

1 This was privately printed by the author for presentation only at Sydney, March 27, 1890. 12mo. 32 pages.

2 A reprint appeared in the '*Scots Observer*', May 3 and 10, 1890.

3 A thin 4to on Japan paper by Messrs. Constable and Co., Edinburgh. Edition limited to 30 copies ; with a portrait of Father Damien.

4 An issue in brown wrappers, small 4to, by Chatto and Windus, at one shilling, 1890. In a letter of the probable date Nov. 29, 1891, Stevenson thus wrote of Mr Chatto : 'he behaved the other day in a very handsome manner.



He asked leave to reprint *Damien*; I gave it to him as a present, explaining I could receive no emolument for a personal attack. And he took out my share of profits, and sent them in my name to the Leper Fund'.

5 The two definitive editions of Stevenson's works, the Edinburgh and the Thistle, contain the *Open letter*.

6 An edition of 25 copies on Japan vellum by Mosher of Portland, Maine. A reprint on Van Gelder paper limited to 450 copies, and a second reprint of 50 copies on Japan vellum, 1897.

‘Through such souls alone  
God stooping shows sufficient of His light  
For us i' the dark to rise by’.



CHISWICK PRESS, CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO.  
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